

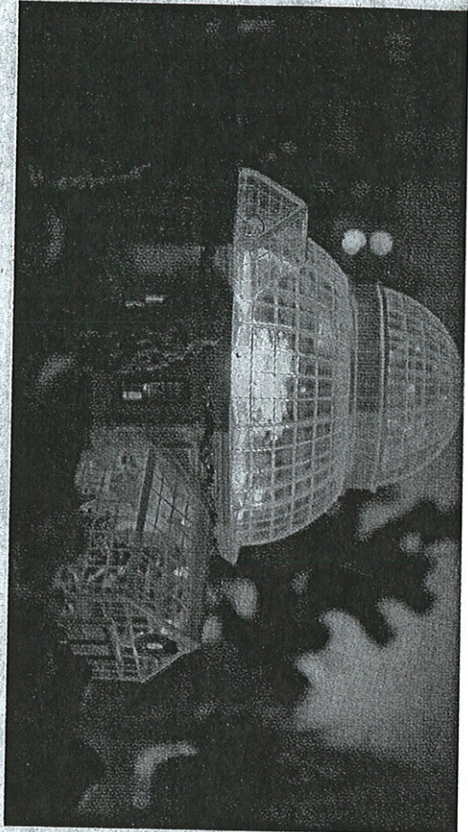
If you drive down Edward Street this time of year you just might catch a glimpse of an entire village through one house window.

Inside Dottie Horvath's living room she has more than 120 miniature buildings fit up along an elaborate network of snowy roads, bridges and waterways. The incredible collection started almost 14 years ago, when Dottie got her first piece.

"It has become a great hobby for me and my family, and it really gets us in the Christmas mood when we set it up," said Dottie.

That's no easy task, with all the buildings and hundreds of accessory

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With the lights out, this miniature house casts a beautiful glow.

# VAHS graduation will be an Epic event

By **Seth Jovaag**  
Unified Newspaper Group

Verona Area High School graduates next June will toss their caps inside the spacious Epicenter, the 5,300-seat auditorium that opened in August at Epic's west-side campus.

Principal Kelly Meyers learned in early December that Epic was willing to host the ceremony, and after a tour last week, she told students about the change last weekend in an e-mail.

"It's a beautiful facility," she said. "I think it will be a good thing overall."

The new venue will take the guesswork out of whether to hold graduation at either the football stadium or inside the school gymnasium – a weather-dependent, often stressful decision that sometimes came down to the last minute, Meyers said.

The massive auditorium also will allow school officials to lift the six-ticket limit for graduates when weather forced the ceremony indoors, Meyers

said. The limit – which used to be 15 but has gradually been pared down – was necessary to keep crowds manageable inside the cramped (and often stuffy and hot) gymnasium, she said.

The class of 2008 is expected to include about 345 students. Including spectators, the event on average draws 2,000 people each spring, Meyers said.

The logistics of the ceremony – including where kids and parents will sit,

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about what lies ahead. Instead, the family is celebrating.

Not only is Maier – "Uncle Nate" to his many nieces and nephews – home for a rare two-week leave, he's also marrying his high

Maier's best man is his longtime friend and fellow Navy man, Jared Portz, who is also visiting.

The high school buddies

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## Verona trying to get 'smart' quickly

By **Jim Ferolie**  
Verona Press editor

There's no doubt Verona can expect to keep growing quickly for the foreseeable future.

The city has been steadily booming since the late 1990s, not only increasing in population by about 50 percent during that time but also feeling a buzz in the commercial market, particularly since another rapidly expanding entity – healthcare software leader Epic – decided to set its roots here.

In the past year alone, as Epic grew to almost 3,000 employees and continued to expand its mammoth campus, Verona has negotiated

with three developers hoping to build shopping centers, has seen the rise of a 114-room hotel and the University of Wisconsin's Materials Distribution Center and has had two local companies begin major expansion projects.

But while the city clearly has shown its prowess for attracting residents and businesses, there have been serious debates over what sort of development is appropriate in what places and when. It seems that cultivating growth is one thing, accommodating it without losing one's identity is another.

That was the conflict the

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## PLAN

Continued from page 1

Wisconsin Legislature hoped to mediate when it adopted the Smart Growth law in 1999, essentially mandating the adoption of what's known as a "comprehensive plan" by Jan. 1, 2010. And eight years later, after repeatedly putting it off amid uncertainty over one thing or another, the City of Verona is finally ready to take the plunge of putting it all down on paper.

While many other municipalities have already jumped on that bandwagon – including the Town of Verona, which finished its plan in 2005 and got county approval in late 2006 – the city didn't begin in earnest until this fall and is now bumping up against the deadline of what is generally considered to be a three-year process.

That's the challenge that was handed down to nine eager members of the city's new Comprehensive Plan Committee, which was appointed in November and met for the first time Dec. 10. Their task will be to gather as much public input as possible, make recommendations to the Plan Commission and get it

accepted by the Common Council within two years.

And earlier this month the Common Council and Town Board made the task even more difficult, voting to send a consolidation ordinance to voters using a process that could require adoption of the plan by Jan. 1, 2009.

Though Ald. Steve Ritt, a longtime Plan Commission member and now the chairman of the committee, questioned this requirement as a "penalty" for merging and called it "utterly ridiculous," it's more of a limitation of an untested consolidation statute that was written with other communities in mind.

Nonetheless, the compressed schedule could make for a wild ride as the committee tries to not only do its own study of the issues and hold its own debates but bring the public into the process. Even the non-consolidation two-year window isn't a slam dunk, city administrator Shawn Murphy admitted.

"It's a very ambitious time frame," said Murphy, who recently completed a three-year comp plan process

## 'By its very nature it's controversial.'

City administrator Shawn Murphy

in Prairie du Sac and saw environmentalists pitted against landowners. "If we go through and designate areas that property owners feel should be designated differently, it could cause additional dialogue and review that could delay the process. By its very nature it's controversial."

### Why are we doing this?

As complicated as it sounds, much of the work is done already.

Verona, like most other municipalities, has constructed a multitude of plans over the years – a master plan, a parks plan, a residential phasing plan, a stormwater management plan and so on. But like Wisconsin's multi-tiered system of government itself, those plans aren't integrated and weren't necessarily designed with each other

in mind.

Moreover, they don't fully take into account neighboring municipalities like Fitchburg and Madison or governmental bodies like the Verona Area School District or the Department of Natural Resources and the plans they might have.

"A comprehensive plan strategically and holistically examines and coordinates all of a community's policies, programs, departments, initiatives, services, plans, regulations, responsibilities and other systems," the Department of Administration's factsheet explains.

The city's plans also don't truly consider the public sector, the market, other economic and social factors, natural resources, the community's preferred style or even how it all will be implemented. They mostly deal with the physical characteristics and needs of the city.

That's where the "comprehensive" part comes in.

Many times Verona's leaders have invoked the nickname "Hometown USA" when making a point about growth and development. The idea behind the comp

plan is to prepare for the inevitable growth while still maintaining the flavor that makes Verona Hometown USA.

"By planning for change, communities can make the most of growth, seizing opportunities while avoiding many of the pitfalls," Smart Growth author Sen. Brian Burke wrote in an editorial after his bill became law. "Day-to-day decisions on where to build a new road, how big to make a subdivision and whether to give the downtown business district a facelift should be made by local people, while keeping broader community goals in mind."

The most important aspect, clearly, according to the original framers of the legislation, is the extra transparency and public involvement. Sure, all those other staff-developed plans were approved in public meetings, but not only do average citizens generally not realize there's a reason to show up for those meetings – public hearings aren't required – they might have had trouble staying awake if they did.

But this time around the city will go out of its way to get at least special interest groups involved, if not the general public.

On Monday the Common Council approved a participation plan, which includes multiple surveys, regular mailings in residents' utility bills, focus groups, one or

more open house events and a public hearing, as well as comment cards that will be distributed at each meeting. Already one survey has been sent to Verona Area Chamber of Commerce members for the Economic Development chapter.

So rather than the city making its plans while a disinterested public ignores it, the hope is to really get a finger on the pulse of the community as a whole.

"We're going to attempt to identify groups that are essentially stakeholders," Murphy said. "(The law states that) every reasonable effort should be made to identify and involve the public."

### What's in it

Bill Probowski of EarthTech has been helping to prepare the comp plan, under the watch of city planner Bruce Sylvester, since this fall. He and Sylvester have produced the first of nine chapters, Issues and Opportunities, and gave it to the committee for review at its inaugural meeting Dec. 10.

The other eight will be coming bit by bit: Housing, Transportation, Utilities and Community Facilities, Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Facilities, Economic Development, Intergovernmental Cooperation, Land Use and Implementation.

"All of these chapters will

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## PLAN

Continued from page 2

be available to the public through the process," Sylvester said.

The committee only had time for a short review of Issues and Opportunities, which examined population growth and trends since 1970 and what sort of growth should be expected in the future. That last part is what really needs discussion.

For example, Chapter 1 presents a low, conservative growth estimate, based on Verona's growth in the 1990s, a higher estimate based on its most recent population increase and a medium estimate. The difference just between medium and high is more than 7,000 people, 3,000 housing units and 250 acres between now and 2030.

Though the methodology might be mind-numbingly complex and perhaps boring for many people, the choice the city makes there is still just an educated guess, and it could end up as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Though that part of the Comprehensive Plan would not be an actual city policy, its conclusions likely would drive policy decisions.

"Policies would have an effect on the market and might affect the number we choose for the residential phasing plan," Sylvester said of the 125-unit-per-year residential cap the city imposed in 2001.

Each chapter is expected to have at least one major issue like that needing a political review, both from the committee and interested members of the public. And at its first meeting the committee decided it will post each chapter's burning question on the city's Web site as a pretext to discussion, hoping locals have something to say about it.

For example, before completing the Housing chapter, which will explore existing physical and market conditions and city policies and will set goals for future residential choices, the committee will gather Realtors, local housing developers and managers of affordable housing in the community. For the Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Facilities chapter, which will take stock of current resources and conservation plans, the committee will attempt to consult with the Town of Verona, local farmers, the Upper Sugar River Watershed Association, the Park Board, the Verona Historical Society and any other groups that come to mind.

It's important to give everyone a chance to put their two cents in, Murphy said, because much of a comprehensive plan is "enforceable as an ordinance," meaning it's also more difficult to change. "It forces the communi-

ties to think very carefully about how they want to grow and then designating those areas," Murphy said.

### What if?

The toughest part could be preparing it with the merger question in mind. That decision will be made by voters in April, leaving as small as an eight-month window if it passes.

As a result, the committee is proceeding to some degree with the assumption that it will, simply for the sake of expediency. After all, should the consolidation referendum fail, the committee can stop and take a breath and finish in a brisk two years.

In the meantime, the committee will need to stay mindful of land use compromises worked out at the consolidation study committee level. Ritt, fortunately, was chair of that committee, too – and will need to work with the town government to determine conditions in the entire town and residents' concerns.

The town's comprehensive plan can be used as a model for many aspects of the plan, and the land use map designed by the study committee is likely to provide the framework for the physical development aspects.

After choosing a growth rate and making adjustments to Chapter 1 at its next meeting, Jan. 21, the committee will work on Housing, then hold an open house in the spring.

After the consolidation vote is held, the committee will turn its attention to Economic Development, based partially on the Chamber survey, then Utilities, Transportation and Resources. By the time the *Inter governmental Cooperation and Land Use* chapters roll around in the summer, most of the consolidation-dependent boundary agreements with neighboring municipalities should be settled, if not signed.

That would only go so far toward making the Jan. 1, 2009, deadline, but Murphy is hopeful that the comp plan wouldn't subvert the will of voters. The legal language isn't perfectly clear, but it appears that the term "comprehensive plan" as used in the consolidation statute (Wis. Stats. 66.0230) can refer to a master plan – which the city already has.

Until an answer is available from the Department of Administration, however the committee isn't taking any chances. "I have sent a request for an opinion from (DOA administrator) George Hall as to the possibility of extending the deadline," Murphy said. "He realizes the dilemma we are in, but he also didn't make the rules."

## Babysitter charged with reckless homicide

By Seth Jovaga  
United Newspaper Group

A Verona day-care provider faces charges of first-degree reckless homicide after she allegedly caused the death in September of a 4-month-old she was caring for at her Fairview Terrace home.

Last Friday, Jennifer L. Hancock, 37, made her initial appearance in Dane County Circuit Court, where she also was charged with two counts of child abuse for two earlier incidents in August.

According to the criminal complaint filed last Friday, Verona police responded to a 911 call from Hancock just before 1 p.m. on Sept. 7 and found Lincoln Wilber lying on the floor, unconscious and pale. The boy died four days later at UW Hospital when doctors withdrew life support.

After an autopsy, doctors and police concluded that Wilber died of "nonaccidental abusive head trauma," the complaint said.

According to the complaint, Wilber had attended daycare at Hancock's home for five weeks before his death. His parents, who are from Belleville, told police that prior to dropping the

child off for day care Sept. 7, he was "happy and smiling" and played in the back seat of their car with an elephant toy while he held his mother's hand.

In interviews with Hancock after the 911 call, however, Hancock told police that Wilber had been "fussy like he always is in the morning" and that with two 3-year-olds and her own daughter to watch, "I don't have a lot of time" to hold and bounce him, the complaint said.

Hancock said in the interview that after feeding Wilber in the morning, the kids read and played outside for about an hour. Later, after feeding Wilber lunch, she said, she set him in an infant seat and checked on her laundry.

When she returned, she told police, his eyes were mostly closed and he looked "really weird." She said she couldn't wake him up, so she called 911 and tried to do CPR until help arrived.

When police arrived, the complaint said, Hancock told them the child "was fine all day, nothing out of the ordinary, it was an ordinary day."

In later interviews, another parent who hired Hancock for day care told police that she'd been alarmed as early as Aug. 24, when she saw

## GRADUATION

Continued from page 1

where the band will perform and how staff might utilize the Epicenter's IMAX-like movie screen – are still to be decided. Officials are also mulling whether to bus graduates to Epic's campus to prevent parking congestion.

Meyers said she expects to hear some complaints about having graduates receive their diplomas off-campus. "I know there's something to be said about having it on your own grounds, and I don't disagree with that," she said. But as graduating classes

grow, the school is at the "cusp point" of being able to fit everyone in the gym. In the Epicenter, space won't be a problem.

"I think the pluses far outweigh the minuses," she said. Epic waived any rental fee, but the school will need to cover some as-yet undetermined costs to pay Epic personnel to open the building and handle audio and video duties, Meyers said. VAHS also will save money by not needing custodians to set up chairs and stages.



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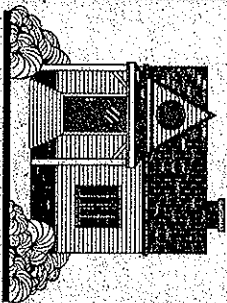


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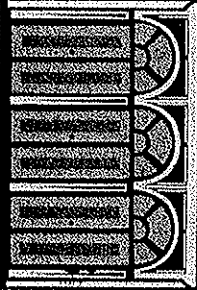
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